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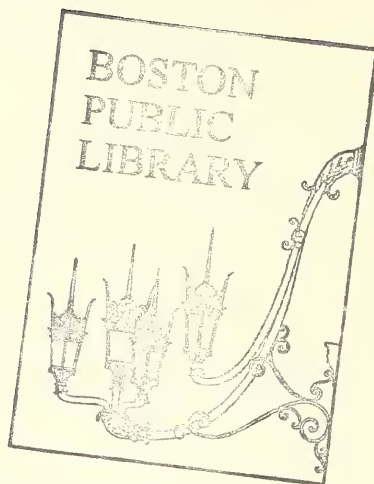
BOSTON URBAN WILDS

An Open Space Conservation Program

By THE BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
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BACKGROUND

After 3½ centuries of development, large tracts of environmentally significant open space remain in almost every Boston neighborhood. These lands have not been developed for several reasons: 1) they have been difficult to build on as they may, for example, contain wetlands or steep/rocky terrain; 2) they are inaccessible; or 3) they are part of a private estate or institution.

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

1. To inventory analyze and classify all environmentally significant private and institutionally-owned open space throughout Boston.
2. To produce public information about natural, scenic and historic public open spaces in the city which would be distributed during the Bicentennial to residents (through Little City Halls) and tourist (at information booths).
3. To develop a methodology and program for preserving environmentally significant open space areas.
4. To formulate an urban conservation program which could be adopted by the city and implemented during the next 10 years.
5. To promote open space awareness and consolidate a constituency of open space advocates in City Hall and Boston's neighborhoods.

FINDINGS

1. An inventory of environmentally significant open space in Boston produced a data base of 145 separate properties totaling over 2000 acres of land.
2. Each property has been designated as a "natural area", which for the purposes of the study, is defined as:

An area of land or water which either retains or has reestablished its natural character, although it need not be completely undisturbed, or which retains unusual flora, fauna, geological or similar features of educational, scientific or recreational interest.

The inventoried properties contain at least one of the following natural features: coastal wetlands; inland wetlands; river or harbor shorelines; hilly terrain; rock outcroppings; woodlands; unusual vegetation or specimen trees.

3. Open space conservation programs have been proposed in the following districts where natural areas remain:

East Boston - extensive areas of salt marsh can be found in Wood Island Bay and Belle Isle Inlet. We are proposing to Massport that these marshes be transferred to the MDC and developed as a conservation and recreation reservation.

Charlestown - undevelopable sections on top of Bunker Hill in the vicinity of Meade St. provide scenic overlooks of Downtown Boston. They have been proposed for development as hilltop neighborhood parks.

Brighton - large areas of undisturbed wooded hills and landscaped institutional properties remain and have the potential for being incorporated into a greenbelt of open spaces for conservation and recreational purposes.

Roxbury and Jamaica Plain - properties containing rock outcroppings, abandoned quarries and very steep hillsides have been bypassed by development. These areas, which are presently used informally for recreation, should be developed as neighborhood "conservation" park, thus redressing the shortage of useable open space in this area.

West Roxbury, Hyde Park, and Roslindale - in addition to the Charles-to-Charles Corridor, these districts still possess numerous natural areas which are primarily owned by private institutions and the City's Real Property Department. We are recommending that a Mid-City Greenbelt be established that would link existing parks, such as Franklin Park and Stoney Brook Reservation, with newly established neighborhood parks, conservation areas and tree-lined streets. As the first stage of implementation, we have begun the procedure of transferring environmentally significant land from the Real Property Department to the Conservation Commission for conservation and recreational purposes.



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<http://www.archive.org/details/bostonurbanwilds1976bost>

Dorchester and Mattapan - numerous vacant properties along the Mother Brook, Neponset River and Dorchester Bay which currently blight the surrounding neighborhoods, should become riverside and shorefront parks. We have proposed to the MDC that they acquire to remaining properties and incorporate these into their Dorchester and Neponset River Reservations.

4. Based on a priority system arrived at through both qualitative and quantitative evaluations of the 145 properties, we are recommending that the city, through the Conservation Commission or the MDC immediately acquire the eighteen (18) properties which rated as most environmentally unique and socially significant properties. These properties are located in East Boston, Brighton, Jamaica Plain, West Roxbury and Hyde Park.
5. Additional actions beyond acquisition and design review are required in order to preserve irreplaceable natural resources. Some of the recently developed open space conservation techniques we are presently exploring include:
 - a) Directing new development to conform to natural area preservation concepts and legislation. Under this approach design standards and policies for public utilities would be adapted to the preservation concept: utilities should be located underground; layout and grading of new streets and developments would conform to the natural topography without excessive cuts and fills.

- b) Enforcement of special police power regulations including the Wetlands Protection Act and the new Flood Hazard District zoning. Also policy controls regarding tree cutting and grading would be developed.
- c) Transference of development rights: the owner of land designated for conservation could keep the natural area open and use development rights attributable to the natural area on adjacent land in his ownership, or could convey the rights to owners of other land in the vicinity.
- d) Conservation restrictions allowing the City to acquire development rights to a particular property. The owner would continue to enjoy exclusive rights to ownership of the land and use it for permissible activities such as gardening and passive recreation.
- e) Use of existing City-owned land. The City already has title to a considerable amount of land as a result of proceedings for non-payment of taxes. Much of the land consists of rocky terrain or wetlands which became tax delinquent because they were not suitable for building. Properties evaluated as environmentally significant would be transferred from the Real Property Department to the Conservation Commission under this alternative.
- f) Protection of large natural areas through their designation as Special Natural Area Districts. Under this plan zoning regulations could be established to protect existing unique natural features in new developments.

WHAT THE STUDY HAS ACCOMPLISHED TO DATE

1. The extensive City-wide inventory has become a useful document for District Planners and the Conservation Commission by: 1) establishing a system of priorities through which open space areas can be rated for purposes of planning implementation and development strategies 2) monitoring sites and areas where development pressures might occur, 3) defining special characteristics of "vacant" land, 4) presenting new options for "vacant" land and, 5) focusing attention on the need for comprehensive land use planning on both neighborhood and district levels.
2. Some of the sites we have evaluated have included environmentally significant open spaces managed by the Real Property Department. We have proposed that Real Property transfer this land to the Conservation Commission who would manage the land for conservation and recreation purposes. This process will be completed this Autumn by the Public Facilities Commission. Through this transfer the City will have established a major open space program and acquisition technique without the need for capital expenditures.
3. Major open space conservation acquisition programs have already been proposed to the Metropolitan District Commission and to Massport. These proposals are currently being evaluated through the Master Planning and acquisition efforts of these agencies.

PRODUCTS OF THE STUDY

1. A "suitable-for-framing" brochure describing things to do outdoors in Boston. Highlights of the brochure will be: 1) a brief history of conservation in Boston, 2) a guide to accessible public hilltop and shorefront parks, reservations, historic parks and cemeteries; beaches or marshes; and the Harbor Islands; and 3) recommended ways to explore open space in Boston.
2. Descriptive site markers to be installed in scenic, natural and historic parks; and on hilltops and other natural areas such as beaches, rivers and marshes.
3. A short planning report entitled - BOSTON URBAN WILDS: An Open Space Conservation Program.

The audience will include: 1) Local, State, and Federal administrators; 2) City Hall Commissioners (Vey, Prevost, Forgione) and Little City Hall Managers; 3) Professional staff; 4) landowners and developers of sites studies and recommended for conservation.

The contents will include:

- . Introductions by RTK and Mayor White
- . Purposes of study
- . Philosophy and need for urban natural area conservation



- . Methodology of Study
- . Findings and recommendations
- . Open Space Conservation Plan and Program
- . Policies
- . Priorities
- . Implementation Strategies

